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THE FABRICATED SHOPPING EXPERIENCE: AN IMPERSONAL IMPRESSION
ON CONSUMERISM

by

SHERRI NIENASS
B.S. the Florida State University, 2009

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master in Fine Arts in Studio Art and The Computer
in the School of Visual Arts and Design
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term
2012

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ABSTRACT



Figure 1: Legs, Atlanta, GA, Shopping Series, Photo by Author, 2011

I have a compulsion to document my surroundings. I do this in all forms possible; through a picture text-message, a point-and-shoot camera, or through a high end camera. Like most women in contemporary society, I feel an expectation to be gorgeous. While I do not feel this pressure directly from my boyfriend or close friends, I am constantly surrounded by advertisements for beauty products enforcing the importance of being attractive.

My current occupation as a cosmetic counter makeup artist relies on convincing women to enhance their appearance. I am fascinated by how easily I can persuade clients to purchase unnecessary products.

My art is both a celebration and commentary on the beauty industry and contemporary consumerism. My approach to this series is varied and complex. The individuals photographed are unaware of their participation in the creation of my work. I do not intend to exploit the subjects or places that I photograph, rather my work comes from a very natural understanding of this environment based on several years working in a major department store. I attempt to attach multiple emotions of — empathy, humor, and sometimes sympathy — to the moments I capture.

My work is not fabricated or recreated, — it is documentary. I am aware of the times I live in, and the people that inhabit these times and places. Once documented, the captured moments in time can be reflected on from a multitude of perspectives at a later place and time.

Because I also contribute to the general shopping and grooming experience, the details of these images come from a trained eye and attentive approach. I have chosen to write this thesis in an auto-biographical narrative because I play many roles. I am the retail specialist, the artist, the photographer, and the consumer.

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I love you. Where's my bunny?

I attribute the level of my Masters degree to these outstanding people.

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ADOLESCENCE

I was always creative as a child. I grew up in the Midwest, in friendly Oshkosh, Wisconsin. I loved to sing, I loved to dance, and I loved to create art. My mother worked a part-time job in retail while my brother and I were in grade school, and my father was a designer for a major paper company. When I was 12, my family moved to Melbourne, Florida. I was forced to part ways with friends and family I had known since I was a toddler. I had just finished my first year in middle school, and was entering that awkward pre-teen mindset of finding myself.

I began school late. Central Florida's school system was on a different time schedule than Wisconsin's. I struggled to make friends. I was thrown into a completely different environment, and was exposed to things I had only seen in movies; such as pregnant teenagers, vulgar language, and students talking back to teachers. Coming from a wholesome family, this was not only scary, but a real culture shock. I couldn't wait for school to end so I could go home.

Things changed for me a couple months later. A popular boy took interest in me in the 7th grade, and I purchased a disposable camera to capture a physical image of him because he was moving out of town. Being a twelve year old, I didn't think (or even know how) to turn on the flash on the camera. My photographic image of him never developed. I reconnected with this particular boy years later, but as an adult, a physical photograph of him no longer mattered. I was interested in that specific memory of him as a teenager that could no longer be created.

Looking back, I realize this documentary-failure sparked my interest in

photography. As a seventh grader, I would either save my lunch money, or convince my parents to purchase disposable cameras for me. I always had one handy. I photographed my friends and what I was doing at the time– so I wouldn't forget. In figure 2, I photographed two friends outside of a local Wal-Mart .

When I was a freshman in high school, I finally purchased a cheap film camera. I was able to experiment with various qualities of film, vibrant colors, and black and white. This contributed to my constant photographing, and desire to always have a camera with me. I photographed more than just my friends; I began photographing everyday scenes, my high school's football field, the detail on my cheerleading outfit, things that unknowingly then, would become significant in the future.



Figure 2: Lindsay and Laura outside of Wal-Mart, Photo by Author, 2004

My older brother purchased a scanner for me in Christmas of 2001. I began scanning images into a new digital form. In 2003, my brother bought a digital camera for me. We are very close siblings. My brother is much more of a carefree risk-taker than I am. I often need an extra push for motivation and he invested confidence into my fascination with photography.

Things changed from that point on. I was able to take photos and immediately edit through, mess around with, and manipulate images for something more than documentary purposes. The camera began as a way for me to capture my friends, our interests,

activities, and my surroundings. In retrospect, I may have even used the images to assure myself that I fit in with a group of other teenagers. High school is awkward.

My high school didn't have a photography program; in fact it had a poor visual art program. I was unable to grow in my knowledge of fine art, but was able to grow in documentary photography. I became the staff photographer for our high school's newspaper. This was a very basic task, but I recall trying to take things a step further. I specifically remember photographing a talent-show competition. The flashes from the camera really irritated the drama director. I got along with this teacher, but I'll never forget her mentioning to me that no other staff photographer had photographed from so many angles, and had traveled around to get so many shots. I found that absurd.

During high school I did cheerleading, theatre, dance, and flag spinning for our marching band. In my senior year, a sewing class became available to me. I remember sewing basic things like pillows and pajamas, unaware that I would ever come back to a sewing machine after that sewing class. I was fascinated with fashion and name brands, but creating mundane articles of clothing made from cheap fabrics didn't appeal to me. These activities later had an influence on my interests and work.

ASSOCIATE #1532099

The summer after high school, and before I started college, I began working at a major department store. I eventually became the store's only cosmetic associate. At 18, I had to research products and convince the clientele to keep coming back. I had to persuade shoppers to depend psychologically on purchasing unnecessary beauty enhancements. This experience raised awareness of my personal spending habits, and attraction to name brands. This later becomes important in this narrative, because it signaled the beginning of a cultural awareness that has grown to become an essential aspect of what I am attempting to capture in my current series of photographs.

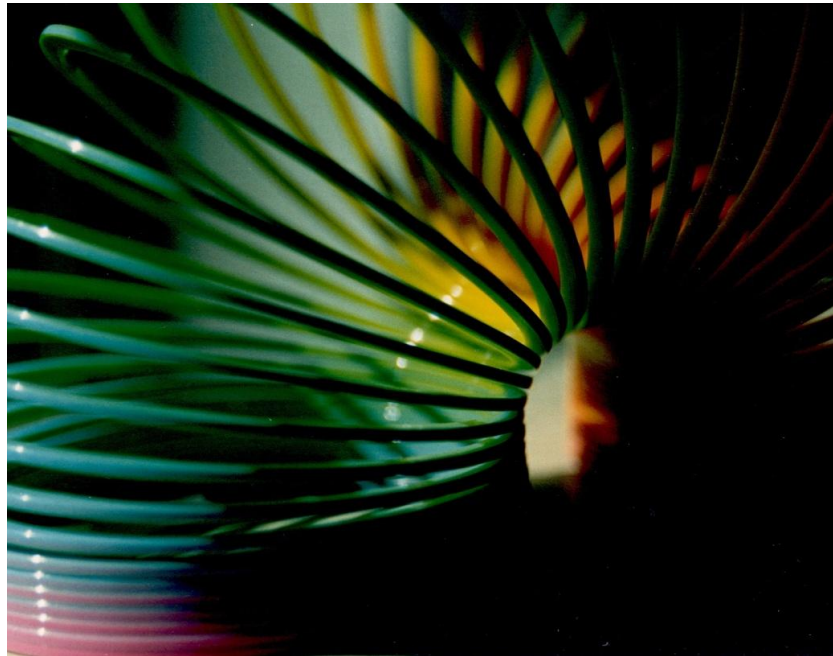


Figure 3: Slinky, 2006, Color Photograph, Photo by Author, 2006

I was given the opportunity to experience darkroom processes at the community college I attended before going to Florida State University. I was trained in highly technical and formally excellent silver gelatin and color darkroom processes. In figure 3, I challenged myself by developing an image of a colorful slinky in a color darkroom. In figure 4, I developed a black and white image of cosmetic items I had purchased. I understood and knew how to work color dials, how to tone images, how to fix incorrect exposures and how to correctly rinse, wash and preserve delicate prints. This knowledge became deeply embedded in my mind long before I became familiar with Photoshop.



Figure 4: Empty MAC Boxes, Photo by Author, 2006

My skill as a traditionally trained photographer in every medium has worked out to my advantage. I would spend hours developing in a darkroom—developing the negatives, checking the temperatures to make sure they were correct, cleaning the negatives, handling the paper and equipment properly-- the list goes on, and I still remember the fear of potentially failing to take the necessary steps at times. The entire process took patience. There was no way to cut corners, and after the intensity and time of these classes, many students realized that art was not their calling. I realized art was my calling.

I was exposed to photographer Cindy Sherman in my first college-level art class. As a student, I was influenced by her work and attitude as an artist. I was interested in how she used herself to portray others in her photographs by making herself into unspecific cliché women that were common in movies during the 60's and 70's. Sherman would create sets, apply make-up and use body language to transform herself into an icon.



Figure 5: Untitled Film Still #21, Photo by Cindy Sherman

In figure 5, (untitled film still #21), Sherman is photographed from a low perspective and her expression is uneasy. She appears to be a stylish young woman who has arrived in a large city. The image has a cinematic feel. Her untitled film stills were a large inspiration for me, as they were a conceptual commentary on society's portrayal of women.

Cindy Sherman said:

"I didn't want to make "high" art, I had no interest in using paint, I wanted to find something that anyone could relate to without knowing about contemporary art. I wasn't thinking in terms of precious prints or archival quality; I didn't want the

work to seem like a commodity.”

“The work is what it is and hopefully it’s seen as feminist work, or feminist-advised work, but I’m not going to go around espousing theoretical bullshit about feminist stuff.”

Much like Sherman, I was searching for a way to visually express myself within my own context of experiences to an audience that isn’t necessarily versed in fine art. Twenty-seven exposures come in a disposable camera. Twenty-five sheets come in a pack of Ilford darkroom paper. Creating visual art via photography wasn’t cheap. I had to be particular in how I utilized my time, and film. I began to shoot with a digital camera during my junior year in college. I was equipped with traditional photographic skills but found that once I shot digitally, the hours invested in making a great image through traditional methods were no longer necessary.

THE ATTRACTION

In 2009, I traveled to Atlanta, Georgia for the first time to attend a friend's bachelorette party. I went early, because I had a portfolio review and a tour of Savannah College of Art and Design at the Atlanta campus. I had a few hours, so I decided to enter a high-end mall before the rest of my friends arrived. I saw a free-standing Juicy Couture store for the first time. I immediately took a photo, which is shown in figure 6. I was completely taken in by its light pink and ivory interior, the white writing on the glass and the limited quantity of garments. I did a double take when I noticed the shoppers. Inside were women my age—shopping in jumpsuits? These women had expensive purses, perfect hair, and gorgeous faces.... and were in jumpsuits. Logically, they weren't even practical jumpsuits. They were so tight; you couldn't run or workout in them.



Figure 6: Juicy Couture, Atlanta, GA, Photo by Author, 2009

I used my camera for snap-shot purposes the rest of the weekend, but upon my return to Tallahassee, I couldn't help but reflect on the image I had taken at the shopping mall. Unsure of my fascination with the subject, I presented the image to one of my favorite professors. I was immediately questioned by him about things I couldn't answer. What was I trying to say with this image? How was it compositionally a good image? The moment the subject was shot down, I stopped listening. The topic was too vague, and the concept wasn't there. I didn't understand my attraction to this subject, and why I documented it.

I began to pursue other projects without considering photographing in malls again. During this time, I was photographing feminine items. I always photographed my makeup, clothing, perfume bottles, etc. My work has always been feminine—in fact; I purchased a pink backdrop for a studio and lighting class because I didn't like the option of only photographing against black or white. Figure 7 presents two models I photographed against this backdrop. This continues to be a running joke when I am reacquainted with past professors at various photo conferences.



Figure 7: Rachel & Christina with Cupcakes, Photo by Author, 2008

I decided not to take a break after earning my bachelors degree. I immediately began graduate school at the University of Central Florida. Orlando is different than Tallahassee, but once again, I continued to work as a makeup artist, and realized that the shoppers in Orlando were a whole different class of people. There were gigantic cosmetic super-stores, countless shopping malls and plenty of things for a socially and beauty conscious young woman to do. International tourists spend days shopping at these locations that are very close to my residence. Bringing my camera to document these establishments came naturally.

THE CHANGE

I'll never forget the day I sat down with a professor to show her what I had done. Nervous because of a previous professor's stance on the work, I had already mentally prepared myself for a let-down. She reflected on the image for a couple minutes, and asked me to explain what was going on.



Figure 8: Governors Square Mall, Tallahassee, FL Photo by Author, 2009

The first thing I pointed out was the women facing away from me in the Juicy Couture sweatpants. There wasn't a Juicy Couture in this shopping mall. I commented on the fact that wearing these loungewear items is perfectly acceptable in society today, because they cost well over \$300 per set. I mentioned the women in the background of the image, gazing at the two young females proudly approaching. The female on the left has a high end purse. Both of them had their hair and makeup completely done. While I realize

this is a completely normal situation, I knew it was strange.

After a long conversation with this professor, I began to understand why I was making this work. I do not consider my work to be edgy, nor do I attempt to make it so. It's not fabricated or recreated, it's true. It is documentary photography because I am aware of the times I live in, and the people that inhabit these times and places. Once documented, the captured moments in time can be reflected on from a multitude of perspectives at a later place and time.

Let it be understood that I am *embracing girlyness*. By no means am I mocking this astonishing feminine culture, I am aware of it, I live in it, and I am part of it. I confess that I contribute to this cycle of consumerism and if I had to vocalize a stance on my work, I would say it's a dilemma. I document the shoppers' relationship to their surroundings, with a sympathetic understanding of wanting things we don't need. While that may be considered a serious statement, I have to admit the contradiction that at the same time, I'm not one to be taken seriously. I adore playing and I am generally a silly person. I feel adamant that my work must reflect all these aspects of my character. Figure 9, titled "Hello, Bombshell" has been internationally exhibited, and I feel the image reflects my personality.



Figure 9: Hello, Bombshell, Orlando, FL Photo by Author, 2009

People generally laugh when they first see this image. This image is successful because it's humorous and familiar, however there's a darker side to it regarding the temporary gift of beauty, and youth.

I took a break from the series, and I began other projects. I photographed my used cosmetic items. The idea of expressing memory associated with cosmetic items I owned was personal for me, but hard for others to relate to. I applied makeup on models in a non-traditional way and photographed them in a common and popular commercial style. I experimented with paint, cosmetics, and mixed media on canvas, and attempted to create a new original photographic series.

In 2010, I created a dress using shopping bags and clothing tags. I had fun during this project, and enjoyed the simple idea of it being a "walking

advertisement.” The dress was only part of the process, and I considered the final images (photographs documenting reactions of casual mall-goers) the final work.



Figure 10: Lindsay with Elderly Woman, Merrit Island, FL, Photo by Author, 2010

Photographing the model in the shopping mall aligned with my original shopping series. In figure 10, an elderly woman is examining the young woman I had model an early dress I had made. There was still an element of surprise, yet I had more control over the reactions. The unsuspecting strangers rarely associated me with the model dressed in this hand constructed paper bag outfit. I shot the model from the other side of the mall, and made sure she didn't acknowledge me. This marks the only time I was questioned by security in my artistic career thus far. I knew more than the security guards knew. I basically had to convince security that what I was doing was legitimate. I followed up on

the laws, knew what was legal and what was not, and I was easily able to talk my way out of suspension from the mall. How is it okay to carry a concealed weapon and not a concealed camera?

There was one particular project that assisted in strengthening my shopping series. I will refer to it as the Closet Series. I photographed subjects standing at their closet, and asked them to select an article of clothing they felt held a significant memory (good or bad) in their lives. My first few responses were rather serious. One subject chose the sweater he was wearing while his girlfriend broke up with him. He not only shared this personal memory with me, but tears came to his eyes as he closely held the article of clothing while describing that moment to me.

My fourth subject's mother had been diagnosed with cancer twice, and she selected a shirt regarding the search for a cure. I was the one who got emotional during that photo shoot. I continued the series all summer, and photographed eighteen individuals located in four different states. This project was relevant to my body of work because I felt it drew a connection between the items we own, and the memories we come to associate with them. There have been articles of clothing that I have purposely gotten rid of due to a memory I would rather forget.



Figure 11: Steven with Portillo's Hot Dog T-Shirt, Madison, WI, Photo by Author, 2011

I approached subjects without them knowing what I would be photographing. I often chose to photograph acquaintances instead of good friends. The photo shoots lasted less than ten minutes, and I would ask the subject to immediately write down an explanation of why they had chosen that clothing item. The subject in Figure 11 took a more humorous route than most. While he did nothing wrong, this wasn't the sort of response I was looking for, and most subjects I photographed that summer did something similar.

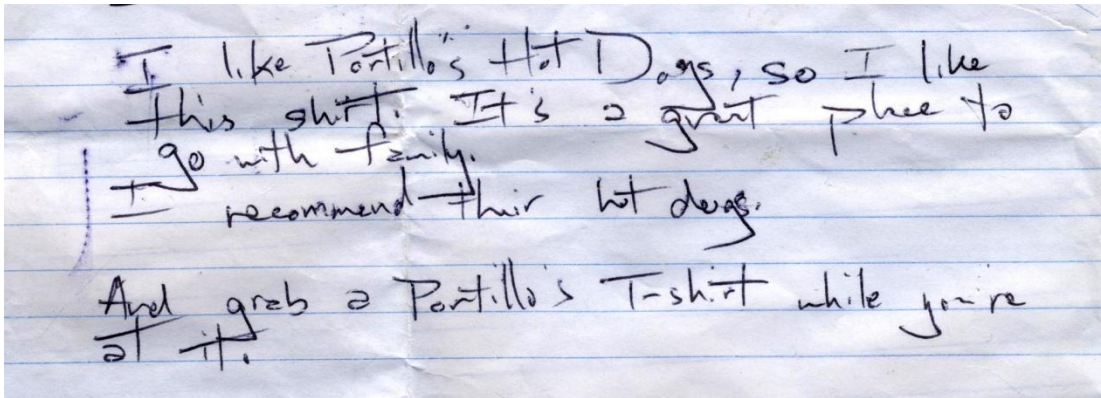


Figure 12, Steven's handwritten statement on T-Shirt

I was more interested in people's secrets. In figure 12, the subject shared a very basic story. I wanted the subject to select articles of clothing that they associated a dark secret or touching moment with. I didn't want the mediocre moments in-between. I decided not to continue with this series because I found people were holding back too much. I felt I said everything I could possibly say with this series. The photographs were conceptually interesting, but not formal enough for me.

To be honest, I never truly stopped photographing people in shopping malls. My attraction to the series continued, and I found myself constantly entering art shows relevant to my shopping series. I knew these images were my strongest work, and a part of me was invested in continuing the series. Nothing was as good or natural for me as the shopping series. Although I came away with great ideas and interesting work during my break from the project, I consider it a stepping stone to where I am now.

RELATIONSHIP WITH MY MOTHER

I'll never forget a moment when I was in high school and my mother came into my room to wake me up. She put her hands on my face and made a comment about the acne problem I had accumulated. Her intentions weren't to be hurtful, but it was something that stuck with me. We immediately went to a cosmetic counter so I could take care of my skin. While I can't imagine doing that exact thing to a teenager, I recognize that doing so is my job, in my other life, as a makeup artist.

I've worked at a retail store since I was 18 years old. My mother was affiliated with retail stores for as long as I can remember. This clearly has had an influence on my work, and my personal ideals when it comes to consumerism and the beauty industry. I'm twenty-four now, and I occasionally break out, or get a blemish. Every time this happens, I work very hard to cover it up. I rarely leave my apartment without makeup. Natural beauty is great, but it's not for me. Natural beauty was never for me. I used to sit on the floor as a toddler and watch my mother apply makeup on her face in the morning. I only purchase high end cosmetics; my Mom only purchases high end cosmetics. Shopping is a pattern I believe occurs in many Mother/Daughter relationships.

Spotting Mother/Daughter couples is very easy. In figure 1, I photographed a mother shopping with her four daughters. I find they usually have similar purses (often name-brand purses), and depending on their wealth, without verbal communication they'll either travel to the same high end stores or clearance racks. Women with knockoff- brand purses often travel right to the sale racks. I often find myself following Mother/Daughter

couples around malls, because I'm interested in how they interact.



Figure 13: Art is Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful, Photos by Marina Abramovic

I became inspired by Marina Abramovic's "*Art is Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful*" (Figure 13) after seeing it at Art Basel (Miami Beach) in 2010. I even began a project that became therapeutic for me. Much like Sherman and Abramovic, I don't mind using myself in my work. I gravitate to artists who use themselves in their work, and I would never ask a subject to do something I wouldn't do.



Figure 14: Video Stills from Video Putting on Today, Video by Author, 2011

Putting on Today was a short-lived project that involved video recording the application of my makeup and hair styling through the entire day. Figure 14 presents two film stills from one of the videos. Figure 15 shows the large scale of how the images were presented.



Figure 15: Final presentation of Putting on Today, Photo by Gabe Gonzalez

These videos range from three minutes to forty-five minutes depending on my itinerary for

the day. The videos had up to four-hundred screenshots taken from them, and were attached to a wall in grid-like patterns, resembling wallpaper.

CONSUMERISM: INSIDE AND OUT



Figure 16: Kohl's #954, Black Friday Morning Huddle, Photo by Author, 2010

It has been excellent for me as an artist, and a privilege for me as a photographer to have the opportunity to capture shots that only an employee of a major retail store could. As an employee, in the service industry, I strive to understand the customer's wants and needs. In figure 16, I photographed a store manager while he was giving a motivational speech on the morning of Black Friday. I was clocked in as an associate while I captured this photo.

However, the dilemma I face as a salesperson puts me in the position where I'll convince people to purchase things they absolutely do not need. I pretend favorite perfume

is fantastic when it really smells awful. I'll sell them the most expensive bottle of men's cologne while ensuring them it's the greatest scent on the market. I provide customers with service they couldn't dream of expecting elsewhere. The shopping experience is fabricated. The specific retail where I am employed strives to outshine competing retailers, therefore my retail experience is giving the customer what they want to hear, honoring extreme requests, making sure they leave with a smile on their face. However, please remember, I am a victim too. I too, purchase items I do not need, justify the validity of the purchases in my mind, or through my girlfriends.

All of these experiences as both a salesperson and consumer give me a level of understanding that contributes to my work. I take notice of these situations when I'm out photographing shoppers. I hear the personal conversations between associates that are typically unheard by the everyday consumers. I know who is texting behind the sales counter and who is checking their facebook while pretending to fold some shirts. I know the looks given to one another when a strange customer walks through the doors. In figure 17, I photographed a very bored employee at an accessory store. I understand.



Figure 17: Bored Claire's Accessories Associate, Tallahassee, FL Photo by Author, 2011

Shopping has become a very accessible and convenient thing for people to do. There are options for us to purchase items at the touch of a button on our cell phones, and we can constantly browse stores on the internet. There are various web pages dedicated to coupons, and “extreme couponing”, the practice of receiving tons of deeply discounted and/or free merchandise via coupons, has become part of our consumer culture. Shopping has become inescapable. Everywhere we travel, subways, gas stations, hospitals, college universities and airports – all have retail associated with them in one way or another.

I have come to understand that this subject matter has possibilities for future

research that I may not have even begun to tap into, which makes this series of work very exciting for me.

In 1998, New York Times ran an article about shopping facilities being added to airports. This is now a very common thing, but was considered a “trend” at the time. Figure 18 illustrates the article.

It's a Mall . . . It's an Airport

. . . It's Both: The Latest Trend in Terminals



Photographs by Scott Goldsack for The New York Times

And Where Do I Buy an Extra Suitcase?

A number of airports, recognizing that they have a temporarily captive clientele, are turning their concourses into shopping malls. Pittsburgh International, a major hub for US Airways, was one of the first airports to emphasize shopping. It gives merchants access to around 60,000 passengers a day and has about 100 retailers, including the Gap, Victoria's Secret and Clinique.

Sales per square foot

Year	Average suburban mall	Pittsburgh airport
1996	\$257	\$268
1997	\$261 (+1.4%)	\$280 (+5.2%)

Sources: SAA USA Inc., US Airways, International Council of Shopping Centers

Sales per passenger in Pittsburgh

Year	Sales per passenger
'91	\$2.40
'97	\$6.10

The New York Times



Some passengers pass by, but others sample the wares at the Pittsburgh airport mall.

By JENNIFER STEINHAUER

It is not easy to squeeze into a dressing room with two pieces of carry-on luggage and a laptop to try on a pair of jeans. And the sight of three airline captains hovering over a table of pink lingerie at Victoria's Secret still draws a second glance.

But such scenes are quietly becoming as integral to air travel as jet lag, weather delays and nondairy creamer. A number of airports, somewhat surreal spaces where travelers were once content to buy a few magazines and stare nervously at a clock, are starting to look a lot like malls.

In the last few years, dozens of national retailers have opened airport shops, invading what has long been the domain of newsstands, duty-free shops and the occasional live lobster stand by establishing small outposts of the Gap, Victoria's Secret and the like. At least one store, Altitudes, operates only in airports. Such stores are joined by a full array of food chains, including Starbucks and Legal Sea Foods.

The strategy makes some sense. Many retailers have saturated the nation's malls and downtowns, and are desperate for new places to set up shop. And with both business and leisure travel at a decade-long high, a lot of airports are scrambling to freshen up their terminals.

Newsstands and other standbys now share the wealth.

Running a business in an airport, though, can be a logistical nightmare. In no mall in America, for instance, are food merchants forced to take a dozen heads of lettuce through security. Many workers balk at commuting to an airport. And customers often breeze by shops in rushing to the gate.

But for all the headaches, airport stores can be profitable: sales per square foot are often three or four times as high as those for stores in other locations, even though prices are the same as at malls. And ubiquitous delays coupled with the increased security measures that force travelers to get to airports earlier these days means these shoppers-in-motion often have more spare time on their hands. Managers at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport say annual sales average \$950 a square foot, more than three times the business in an average mall store, where the figure tends to be closer to \$250 to \$300.

Airports from Heathrow, outside London, to Pittsburgh International to La Guardia in New York to National have undergone major renovations in recent years in which the addition of new stores has played a key role. Others, like Chicago's O'Hare, are following suit.

While most American retailers have mall life down to a science, though, they are finding that running a shop in an

Continued on Page 4

New York Times

Figure 18: It's a Mall, It's an Airport, the New York Times, 1998

BLACK FRIDAY



Figure 19: Foreign Family on Black Friday, Orlando, FL, Photo by Author, 2011

I usually take my most successful photos during the Holiday season. The shopping day deemed as “Black Friday” is a crucial day for me to shoot images. The name “Black Friday” indicates the point at which retailers begin to turn a profit, or are “in the black”. The day is often described as the busiest shopping day in the nation. Figure 19 shows an exhausted foreign family during this event.

Black Friday is an example of the effect consumerism has on our society. This year, many retailers remained open on Thanksgiving, and most major department stores opened their doors at midnight. Shopping has become intertwined with everything in our culture. The physical act of shopping has very subtly changed over the years; however Black

Friday becomes more chaotic and extreme.



Figure 20: Woman waits outside of Kohl's Department Stores, Photo by Author, 2011

In 2008, a Wal-Mart security guard in Long Island, New York was literally trampled to death by frenzied consumers who forced entrance into the store. At this same location, four shoppers, including a 28-year-old pregnant woman, were also taken to local hospitals to receive treatment for injuries occurring in the event. In 2011, a woman in Los Angeles, California unleashed pepper spray on an estimated 20 shoppers. During the National Basketball Association's all-star weekend in 2012, a riot broke out in an Orlando mall, calling for over 100 deputies to show up in riot gear. This resulted in Nike cancelling the release of their \$220.00 limited edition Foamposite Galaxy shoe. Consumers wait in line for hours, sometimes days, to receive the special deals offered during these events.

In 2010, I worked in a store that opened at 3:00 am on Black Friday, and there

were hundreds of people waiting in line. The first customer ran in... only to purchase three towels. We had vacuums, televisions, and items worth waiting for – all at great prices. This customer chose towels. There must be something exciting about the wait that I don't understand. In 2011, I had to clock into work at 11:30 pm on the evening of Thanksgiving. Figure 20 shows a woman waiting in line shortly before the doors opened to our store.

The images I create are not as extreme as the cited examples, yet it is these desperate acts by seemingly unstoppable consumers doing whatever it takes that fascinate me. Local grocery stores don't have extreme special sales, and if they did, I doubt people would be willing to wait.

INFLUENCES

My influences come from both commercial and fine art photographers. I find inspiration in retail stores and fashion magazines, but am most attracted to cosmetic advertisements. Make-up Art Cosmetics (often referred to as “MAC Cosmetics”) is a large influence. I am a loyal consumer and artistic admirer of this company.

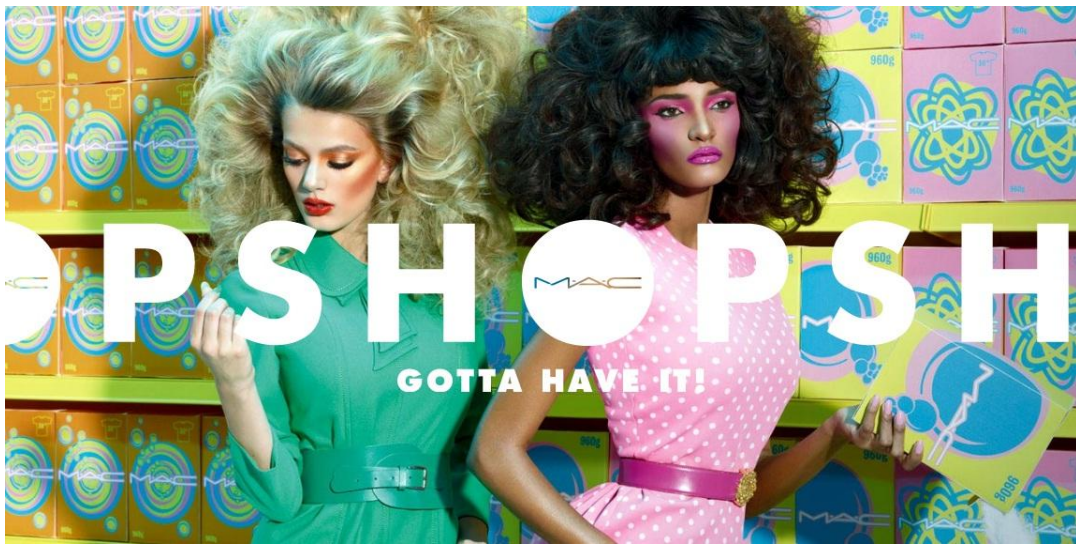


Figure 21: MAC Cosmetics Online Advertisement for new “SHOP!” collection, 2012

MAC has collaborated with many celebrities and various iconic products, such as Barbie, Hello Kitty, Disney, Lady GaGa, Cyndi Lauper and Pamela Anderson. MAC has influenced me artistically because they are a company that is relevant to contemporary art and consumerism.



Figure 22: MAC Cosmetics Advertisement with Cyndi Lauper and Lady GaGa, 2010

I am drawn to the clean presentation of these images. Figure 21 shows models that are styled in dresses popular in the 1960's, and hair and makeup popular in the 1980's. Figure 22 shows celebrities Cyndi Lauper and Lady GaGa for *Viva Glam*, the MAC AIDS fund. MAC donates 100% of the funds raised by selling Viva Glam lipsticks directly to assist those fighting the HIV and AIDS virus. I am especially attracted to companies that donate to causes I feel are relevant in our society. I'm sure this contributes to my seven-year employment with Kohl's department stores. I have volunteered for many causes through the Kohl's Cares program, including children's health and education, advancing environmental solutions and supporting women's health. I had also received an academic scholarship through this corporation. It is hard to walk away from a company that I feel does a lot of good.



Figure 23: Charles Jourdan Shoes Advertisement, Photo by Guy Bourdin, 1975

French Fashion Photographer Guy Bourdin has also had a large impact on my work. Bourdin was arguably the first commercial photographer to create intimate, surreal, strange and sometimes violent imagery associated with a fashion item. Figure 23 shows a woman unrealistically stuck in a wall. Figure 24 shows a woman face down in the grass, with a possible black eye. I was instantly drawn to his minimal and colorful photographs.



Figure 24: Grass, Photo by Guy Bourdin, circa-1980



Figure 25: Man praying outside of a Neiman Marcus, Photo by Author, 2011

Although I am not dealing with shock value, there is a level of my work that deals with absurdity. In figure 25, I photographed what I felt was real surrealism and absurdity; a man praying outside of a Neiman Marcus store. The juxtaposition of the perfect mannequin in the window display, next to this man's personal moment of prayer makes a large statement about contemporary consumerism. I felt guilty taking this photograph, and consider it my most voyeuristic moment.

I am aware that my work, much like my personality, is conservative. I have experimented with the adverse in the past, and understand that those practices have only strengthened my art.



Figure 26: Still from "Paint Me", Video by Jeffrey Hoffman, 2011

In figure 26, I am being painted by a participant in my first and possibly last performance art piece. "Paint Me" was a performance where I openly invited everyone into my studio to throw food, paint, and similar items onto my body. I was absolutely miserable after this and almost vomited. I know it's in my head, but to this day, I still smell old mayonnaise when I straighten a specific area of my hair. I have not done anything similar to this project. However, this was an important exercise for my perception of beauty.

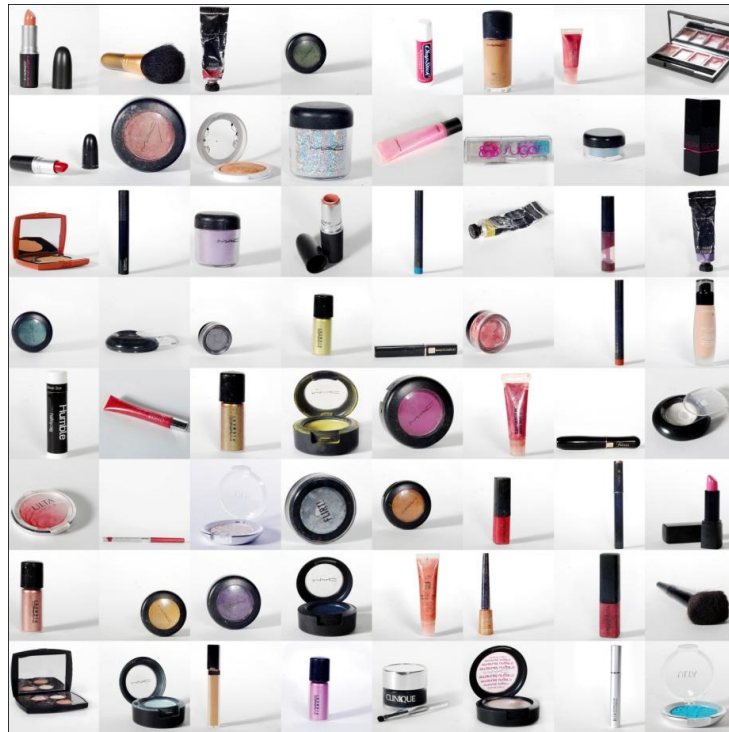


Figure 27: Cosmetics In my Box, Photo by Author, 2010

Bourdin's work can easily be appreciated by both artists and consumers. My aim is to make work that is compelling to everyday individuals, and hopefully appreciated by an audience with a knowledge of fine art. For example, during my project *Cosmetics in my Box*, I shot my used makeup items in a commercially photographic style. The images are set against a plain white background, and lit in a commercially popular way. At first glance, the image is familiar and fun, but upon closer inspection, one realizes the items are used, and dirty. Hopefully questions are raised about the work, and a narrative begins.



Figure 28: (Girl 14, with friend) Girl Culture, Photo by Lauren Greenfield, 2002

Photographer Lauren Greenfield has been a major influence on my work as well. Greenfield's work, specifically her series and book *Girl Culture* (, published 2002) documents women of all ages in various cultural situations. Greenfield establishes a relationship with the subject upon photographing them. In figure 28, Greenfield was in the fitting room with the two teenagers. The images are not fabricated, and fine art is created, while remaining documentary.

Similarly, exhibiting my project "*putting on today*" (figure 29) in a wallpaper format allowed the viewer to discover the subject.



Figure 29: Stills from Putting on Today, Video by Author, 2011

I feel I have a similar approach to that of Greenfield's, but unlike her, I specifically do not want to know the subject. I follow around the individuals I photograph, and like to guess what they are thinking, but I do not know what they are thinking. I photograph their choices, and choose the images I feel have good content and formalism. Another photographer, Brian Ulrich, challenged me to think further about the subject matter I am working with.



Figure 30: Gurnee, IL, Photo by Brian Ulrich, 2003

Ulrich's work began in 2001 as a response to a national call for society to boost the economy through shopping. Figure 30 is taken from a series of images entitled *Copia*.

Ulrich's subjects often appear enthralled by the items which they are viewing. The project later expanded, including thrift stores and ghost malls.

THE PROCESS: SHOPPING SERIES



Figure 31, Self-Portrait, Tallahassee, FL, Photo by Author, 2012

I'm interested in the relationship between the camera and the subject. I've made an effort to insure the subject is unaware of their participation in my work. In the past, I concealed my camera in my purse to avoid being noticed. The moment my camera was seen, the image couldn't be the same. Even now, when the subject is aware of my camera, his or her attention is no longer fully invested in shopping.

I've found recently, that more and more people have been carrying around Digital SLR cameras, and there is no longer a need to disguise my camera. However, I rarely capture images the traditional way, with my camera against my face. When I first began shooting, I would conceal my camera in a purse and photograph using a wireless remote hidden somewhere on my body (hair, pocket, bracelet). I have always aimed to capture

subjects in an intimate experience, or photograph images that document the subject and experience I am exploring in my work.



Figure 32: So Good, New Orleans, LA, Photo by Author, 2010

In figure 31, I am located inside a department store. The retailer was having a major clearance sale, and the area was trashed with shoes. I am unintentionally out of focus in the image. A setback of my shopping series is being unable to re-create special moments. I often document scenes that interest me, and find later, while editing, that the images are either blurred or completely out of focus.

I photograph in a spontaneous way. This sometimes results in a perfectly cropped image being impossible. In a perfect world, the shoppers would be unable to see me. I would have lights set up around the store, and each image would be formally excellent.

In figure 32, I photographed a young woman gazing at earrings across the store. The

images captured before “So Good” reveal her interest in the jewelry, and she slowly walks toward them with undivided attention. After examining the charms, she becomes uninterested, and exits the store. I rarely follow subjects from store to store, even in shopping malls. I don’t want to learn additional information about the subject. I am aware that my shopping series has voyeuristic qualities, yet I photograph the individuals in a respectful manner, and usually only spend four to five minutes maximum on each consumer. It is not the individual I am interested in, it’s the individual’s choices and behavior.

CASE STUDY



Figure 33, Lynn points to colors she owns, Photo by Author, 2012

In early 2012, I took the idea behind my “shopping series” a step further, and to a more personal level, by spending a day with an acquaintance; a young woman fascinated with nail polish. This young woman has an in depth Microsoft spreadsheet detailing the color, consistency, and finish of each bottle she has previously owned or traded. She owns over 350 bottles of nail polish, and during our meeting, she added even more to her collection. In figure 33, I asked her to point out which shades she owns.

In fall of 2009, the high end fashion brand Chanel released a nail polish shade titled “Jade”. This shade currently sells for \$400. While there is nothing different from the ingredients of this bottle than what you would find in a typical \$3 bottle from a drugstore, the rarity of the item adds value.

The brand is Chanel, the color was seasonal and discontinued, and there's dozens of other brands striving to produce this same color. Nail polish knock offs? This should not have come as a shock to me. There are knock-off purses, there's knock-off clothing, why wouldn't there be knock off colors? After the initial interview, I even asked this young woman to critique my nails, and nail polish collection. She pointed out the knock offs that I owned, and knew where every individual bottle came from, including the specific collection and year.



Figure 34, OPI's "How the shrek are you" v. "Did it on you", Photo by Author, 2012

I was cultured on the idea of re-issuing colors, and how some companies even cheat the system. In figure 34, my acquaintance pointed out to me a color released by nail polish brand OPI in 2011, titled "How the shrek are you?", from their 2011 Shrek collection. She compared the shade to a "newer" color, "Did it on you" from the 2012 Nicki Minaj

collection. It was the same. While some may view this as obsessive, her compulsion could be compared to a young man collecting baseball cards, or even someone purchasing songs by the hundreds on iTunes.

THE PROCESS: ADVERTISE



Figure 35, (a) Fredericks of Hollywood, (b) Express, and (c) Wal-Mart, Photos by Author, 2012

We're not allowed to give shopping bags away at my store. I admit, I feel pretty awful about this, especially when a shopper is soaking wet and just looking to protect their purse before running back out to their car in the pouring rain. It's a rule at work; it's a strict loss prevention measure to ensure that shoplifting isn't as easy.

That being said, it's strange for me to step into major malls and directly ask stores for shopping bags. I'm used to doing things a sneakier way. During my first year in graduate school I would "shop" at stores, and take every attractive tag off various articles of

clothing; throw them into my purse, and hope no one stopped me on the way out. I always wondered – what if someone catches me? Could I get in trouble for this? How in the hell would I explain what it is I’m doing? There are no specific laws regarding theft of clothing tags.

I recently stepped into Fredericks of Hollywood. I explained to the cashier what it was I planned to do with these shopping bags, and asked if I could have some. She was absolutely willing to donate (I also found the word “donate” helped my cause) and asked me to come back with photos when I was finished. Her kindness put me in a good mood, and although I got tons of “no, it’s a loss prevention policy....” from most stores, I left the mall with various, colorful bags to go home and work with.

If it wasn’t for that first cashier’s kindness, it’s very possible I would have just given up altogether. I’m reminiscent of a year ago, when I originally meant to execute the idea of making various dresses from various stores. I stepped into a Betsy Johnson store with my roommate, and the cashier absolutely belittled us, judged us, and said “Well, you have to actually BUY something”.



Figure 36: Fitting Vans vest to model, Photo by Andrew Littlefield, 2012,

I create my dresses out of actual patterns made by high end designers. I have used patterns from Cynthia Rowley, Vogue and Vera Wang. I fit the garments to the model and alter the clothing as needed. I install zippers and buttons when necessary. I consider myself a photographer, but enjoy the physical act of sewing outfits and working with models. In figure 36, I am fitting a vest made out of Vans shopping bags to the model. In figure 35, the finished garments are photographed on the models. I created six dresses, two coats, and one vest which are part of my “Advertise” project. While I consider the finished product to be the photographs, it is important to me that each garment is wearable and durable.

RESPONSE



Figure 37: Shoes, Orlando, FL, Photo by Author, 2011

It is important to state here that I create work that is open to interpretation. I want to start a conversation about why my images are relevant to the times we live in. In figure 37, I photographed two women reaching for shoes. I secretly judged their choices, and in a way felt I was shopping with them, and if you must know... I would choose the shoe on the right. I often joke about how my main goal in life is to be happy, but the truth is, it's not really a joke. Creating these images satisfies a need I have to document what is going on

around me. When I find something in my work that I am dissatisfied with, I don't just store it away somewhere, I destroy it. In figure 38, I am destroying an old project.

Photographing is a job, and I often leave shopping malls exhausted. I rarely interact with others during shooting, and it can become a lonely process. The work pays off when I'm at home editing. While I sometimes immediately know an image I've taken is a success, I'm often surprised at what I find during the editing process later.

It is important that my work reflects my personality. The images can be comical; they can be sexy and inappropriate, and even passive to some. However, they are genuine. When I grow tired of digital photography, I find myself creating art with a complete absence of modern technology (the garments in my Advertise project), or I consider potential projects, usually assignments more social than my shopping series. That would be a good departure from my current work.

When I reflect on my photographs, I learn about myself, and my work continues to evolve. I always attempt to capture a timeless moment with the viewer that genuinely resonates with me. I believe my work, regardless of which direction it may travel, will continue to shape my experience as an artist and female.



Figure 38: destroying an old project, Photo by Author, 2011

END.

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